

'Twas a night in St. Petersburg, when all through the house
Not a beaker was stirring, and the burners were doused
The acids and bases were corked up with care,
Awaiting tomorrow's experiments in pristine glassware.
The lab assistants were nestled all snug in their beds,
While visions of tenured positions danced in their heads.
And wrapped up in blankets offering Baltic winter insulation,
Dmitri Ivanovich Mendeleev was beginning a long hibernation.

When a spark of historical genius arrived in a dream –
A rare human glimpse at nature unseen!

~

With the "aha!" moment, he awoke from his slumbers
And scrambled to write down the neat rows and numbers.
See, in this (apocryphal?) telling, the discovery was quick;
In just a few minutes he made it all click.

For his mind had been filled but needed some rest
After three long days of puzzling away at his desk.
And as the moonlight shone on fresh snow outside,
Mendeleev arranged both halogen and halide.
Then, from his invigorated brain did appear,
A place for the alkali metals – it was finally clear!

~

"Now lithium! Now sodium! Now potassium and rubidium!
On beryllium! On magnesium! On titanium on zirconium!"
From the hydrogen on top to the lead at the base,
Mendeleev devised a system where they all had a place.
And when his pattern left a gap in the chart,
He didn't despair or tear it apart.
The great chemist reasoned these holes simply implied
That another element was out there, just not yet classified.

~

In the years that followed, we added so many more,
(Berkeley Lab found 16 – but who's keeping score?)
And the order and structure saw such constant upheaval,
That today, Mendeleev's first version is bizarre to most people.

Yet despite all the flaws in his reverie-fueled revelations,
Science lovers laud what was built on his work's foundations,
So, for the 150th anniversary, we went all in for glory,
A twelve-month homage through art, song, and story.

~

But the year's wrapping up and there's not much left to
write -

Other than Happy International Year of the Periodic Table
to all, and to all a goodnight!

TWAS THE NIGHT BEFORE THE PERIODIC TABLE

by Aliyah Kovner



BERKELEY LAB